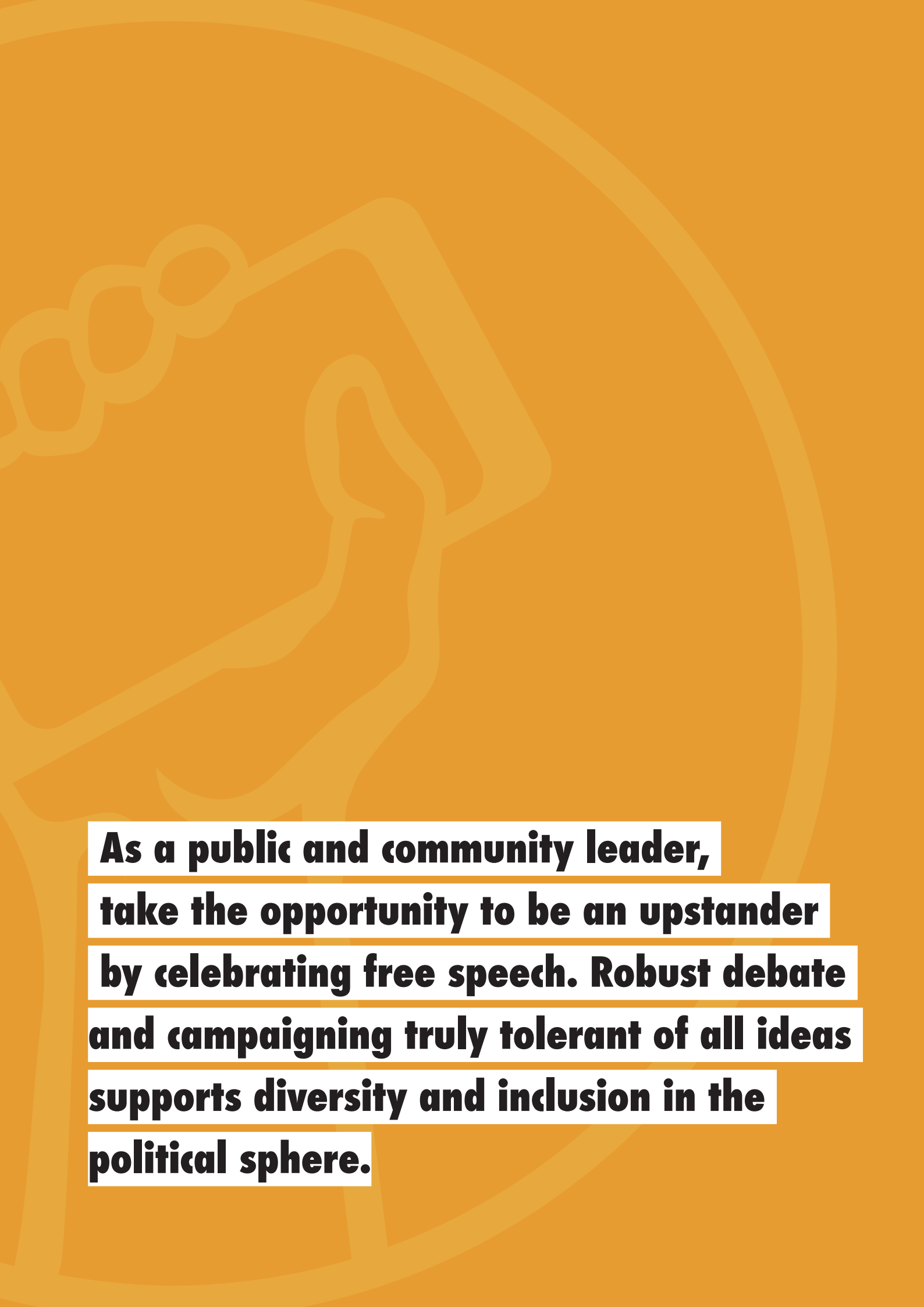




TRULY TOLERANT CAMPAIGNING GUIDELINES



**As a public and community leader,
take the opportunity to be an upstander
by celebrating free speech. Robust debate
and campaigning truly tolerant of all ideas
supports diversity and inclusion in the
political sphere.**

Truly tolerant campaigning guidelines

Message from Jonathan Ayling

Chief Executive, Free Speech Union

Meng Foon and Local Government New Zealand's Inclusive Campaigning Guidelines appear to be innocuous. You could even argue they are well-intentioned.

Don't be fooled.

You are running for office at a particularly fraught time in our history. It is no coincidence that in an especially crucial election that will define our next steps for race relations, local autonomy, and what we term 'acceptable speech', the powers that be have been trotted out to put their fingers on the scale of our democracy, to control what debates we're allowed to have.

This is not democracy. Democracy is enabled by everyone getting to have their say, no matter how unconventional, and free speech is indispensable in that debate.

"We know that this sometimes toxic and challenging environment has built up over a long time, so we acknowledge that shifting what's acceptable – and what is not – will take more than one election cycle. We need to start somewhere though."

Susan Freeman-Greene, Chief Executive of Local Government New Zealand

Who gets to decide what policies are 'acceptable'?
Voters.

Who gets to decide what the important issues are?
Voters.

Who gets to decide what debates need to shift? Voters.

It is not the place of bureaucrats to shift the scope of debate. Your role as a candidate is to listen to the people, express your beliefs and opinions openly, and let them decide.

As candidates, many of you may have held a dream to represent your region since childhood. We would ask you to consider what representation means to you. Does it mean (as it appears to mean to Foon and Freeman-Greene) conspiring with others in power to limit debate and with it personal accountability to voters? Was this what you once dreamed of when you visualised yourself donning the robes of council?

Censorship is what the powerful try when they want ordinary people to have less power- for their own good.

You will better protect your office by rejecting the thinking of Freeman-Greene and accepting that tricky and divisive policy will often lead to inflammatory rhetoric. A true community leader is prepared for this – they will always allow for legal speech – and will push back with the best tool we have for social cohesion - better arguments.

Calling on you, the candidate, to mute or outright silence your stances on vital issues isn't helpful. It undermines our democracy behind a facade of tolerance and fairness that insults the voter and undermines the principal role you are nominating yourself to play.

'What's acceptable' is more often subjective and is normally presented as a way to protect unpopular policy. Respect voters by truly listening and, in turn, letting them hear the real you.

Better arguments are what change the cultural landscape, and we get those through speech.

Things to consider

Running a truly tolerant campaign

PROPOSED GOVERNMENT POLICY IS NEVER A NO-GO ZONE.

At the Free Speech Union, we've often been called upon to support community and activist groups who have been deplatformed by councils for wanting to discuss proposed government policy. We really shouldn't have to explain why this is completely unacceptable, if not outright corrupt. People always have a right to discuss government policy. Meng Foon makes no bones that he is pro co-governance. He is completely entitled to that view but wants candidates to curb their speech accordingly. Co-governance is a major issue and many of your constituents are going to want to discuss it. This is their right, and you need to understand and accept that.

WHO DICTATES WHAT'S RESPECTFUL?

You would've heard the old adage that "you catch more flies with honey". Generally speaking, a respectful candidate is going to reach more hearts and minds. But it does pay to remember that respectful speech is a subjective term and in today's new era of censorship the line of what's acceptable narrows by the day. Also, it is not for us, Meng Foon, or LGNZ, to set parameters for you. Ultimately it is the voters who will decide if you have crossed a line, and trust us, they will.

YES, YOU SHOULD BE ENGAGING WITH UNSAVORY TYPES

There is a political trend today that says a politician shouldn't engage with people who express the wrong views. This is not leadership. You are not being paid to be aloof and selective. Your job is to answer difficult questions and engage with difficult people. When you debate an unsavory perspective, you may not convince the speaker, but you may very well convince many potential fence sitters who witness the exchange.

Freezing voices out of the discussion alienates people from the democratic process. If you're hardy enough for office, you should be hardy enough to engage with everyone – armed with better arguments.

That is leadership.

AVOID ADHOMINIMS

Dismissing opponents as racist, sexist, or bigoted can be an incredibly damaging accusation. If your inclination is to throw such terms around without real proof it would be safe to say your contribution to higher office will be divisive and destructive. To go back to the example of co-governance, it is completely reasonable that voters may have questions and concerns about any changes to governance models. It may be easier to spray and walk away from these people, but your job is to listen and to try to truly understand their concerns. Loose accusations of racism make the fight against real racism harder.

WHAT YOU ARE TELLING VOTERS WHEN YOU STAND AGAINST FREE SPEECH

When you signal to voters that you support censorship and state and local power to suppress views, you are telling them that you are anti-democratic. You are telling them that some voters should have greater speech privileges than others, and that it is perfectly acceptable to ignore swaths of voters who don't adopt fashionable views deemed correct by those currently in power. Candidates who don't support free speech risk alienating voters from the democratic process. This is not a recipe for cohesion, but in fact the total opposite. Free speech is one of our greatest inheritances. Let it inform your candidacy and time in office and you will make a positive and productive contribution to our nation.

Actions you can take

We would never presume to tell you what you can or can't say – but that doesn't mean all free speech is helpful (though it should stay legal). Using free speech with responsibility is important to retain this as a key tool in our democracy.

01/

Play the ball, not the person. When debating issues, don't write off the speech of others simply for who is saying it.

02/

Meaningfully engage with your (future) constituents. Remember- they're the ones voting for or against you! Their speech matters.

03/

Don't police language, the way people say their bit is almost as integral to their argument as what they say- don't force the debate through coercing specific terminology.

04/

Learn what your opponent's believe by letting them speak, for the sake of respectful debate (and your own credibility), before you attack them for it.

05/

Learn why they believe it, so you may better convince others of the truth rather than assuming the worst of them.

06/

Fight bad ideas with better ideas and bad speech with better speech. Elections are the time where the best way to run our communities is decided. To choose the best ideas they must compete fairly, lest they be caught by the censor's pen.

07/

Monitor your social media as an excellent platform for the discussion of new ideas and engagement with members of your community.

08/

Be an upstander against intolerance (such as trying to shut down speech) and resist those that would rather have you shut up than engaged with!

If you want further information or if you have
any questions please contact www.fsu.nz

